



## 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Reef Care Project breaks all records for participation

Castro Perez of the Aruba Tourism Authority was pleased to report that the 14<sup>th</sup> annual reef and beach clean-up that took place this past weekend over Saturday and Sunday mornings was a huge success. On Saturday morning over 400 participants took to the beaches from across the lighthouse area, down the south coast and all the way to Baby Beach to haul away accumulated refuse.

Simultaneously, divers and snorkelers under the supervision of dive operators S.E.A. Fly & Dive, who are also organizers of the event, Red Sail Sports, Unique Sports of Aruba, Mermaid Divers, Pelican Adventures and JADS patrolled undersea areas known to be collection points for garbage because of the currents. “We hit the mother lode on Sunday” reports Charles Pond of Denver, an island visitor that participated in the project as a member of the Mermaid Divers team. “It was a really exciting and worthwhile alternative to the usual sport dive,” agrees Jim Armstrong of Niles, Michigan, who buddied with Charles in helping to collect underwater and floating refuse.

“We know that the clean-up is not only about going out to the beaches for two days out of the year,” confessed Castro. “That is why we are enforcing the goal of the project by going to the schools and making the children aware of their responsibility in keeping their island clean. We hope they take this message back to their parents. This year we had enormous Aruban participation with the Hash House Harriers, a local walking club, being the largest group to participate.” Along with the Hash House Harriers, other group participants included teams from Atlantis Submarine, Turtugaruba, De Palm Tours, AHATA Environmental Committee, Rainbow Girls, Lady Olive Baden Powell Scout Group, The Church of the Latter Day Saints and a last minute entry from Garage Cordia.

Most of the groups gathered at Naphali Henriquez Park on Sunday afternoon to relax and enjoy a cold beer and bit of lunch provided by Super Foods Supermarket, Holiday Inn Catering and other resorts. Balashi Beer and Tropical Bottling along with the distributors of Corona provided refreshment as beach cleaners compared war stories. Robert Moons of RBTT Bank, an important sponsor of the project, also took part this year, and describes the experience as “gratifying.” Despite regularly scheduled clean-ups throughout the year, keeping Aruba’s beaches clean is a constant effort for a variety of reasons. Prevailing currents bring waste that is dumped by boats at seas and deposits the refuse on our north coast beaches. Aruba’s heavy winds will take plastic cups, newspapers, and take-out containers being used by people on the beach and carry them into the sea, so it is important to dispose of these things properly in waste receptacles. Plastic cups and six pack holders are a particular hazard as they also provide a threat to marine life, which often mistake them for jellyfish, a favorite food, and then chokes on them when trying to eat them. Constant care to see that plastics do not blow into the sea is the responsibility of everyone that uses them.

The hard working beach cleaners received their certificates of gratitude and enjoyed the traditional raffle, and many finished the weekend winning on of the plethora of free goodies donated by various resorts, restaurants and vendors around they island. Couples will partake of free weekend stays, delightful dinners for two, or some fun activities from grateful donators of these gifts. They all deserve a pat on the back for their efforts, as do the organizers for all their hard work in making the Annual Reef Care Project a success!